

*“Ensemble theatre at its best...
...breathtaking fluidity and imagination”*



Tess of the d'Urbervilles -2018



Tess of the d'Urbervilles

TightGrip's latest production is a new stage version of Thomas Hardy's great novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Mike and Caroline, joint founders of TightGrip Productions have spent the last two years adapting the book into a play, which had its premiere on the 27th April 2018. This is arguably one of the greatest of all Hardy's novels and contains enormous parallels with the attitude towards women and the social and sexual morality of today. Tess declares "I am not any woman!" as she tries to survive poverty, injustice and betrayal in the harsh world of 19th Century rural Wessex. This new stage version stresses the highly relevant and significant themes that impact on Tess. These themes are of sexual abuse, abandonment, injustice, hypocrisy, inequality, cruelty and manipulation. It is abundantly clear to anyone who reads his books that Thomas Hardy was an ardent feminist way before his time. His stories feature many heroic and powerful women who undergoing extremes of hardship and pain at the hands of men in a world where women were second class citizens and victims to perpetual abuse and ill treatment. These stories Hardy skilfully intertwines with a passion and love that tries to overcome the darker influences surrounding the protagonists. In contrast and away from the darker themes Tess is also a powerful love story in all its guises and convolutions. It is love that drives Tess forward to fight for what is just and fair, regardless of the consequences.

Rehearsals...

Staging a play of this complexity requires a dedicated and committed company prepared to go on a journey of discovery and contribute to the development of the style and content. Whilst we had a provisional rehearsal script, it was probably too long and almost certainly containing sections that might not work or necessarily move the narrative forward. Our experience of staging other epic adaptations, such as *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Great Expectations*, has taught us how important it is to adopt a style for the production that can move the drama forward seamlessly.



The Tess Company had to become an ensemble, capable of playing more than one part, embracing some aspects of physical theatre and bonding into a group capable of utilising these techniques effectively and imaginatively. In addition they would be working with a script that would be fluid and constantly undergoing refinement.



The rehearsal period began with initial text work and the analysis and establishment of the various “worlds” that inhabited the novel. For example the establishment of the comfortable world of Crick’s dairy in comparison with the harshness of Flintcomb Ash. We combined this with the development of the physical aspects that we were keen to explore and encompass. The Tess Company’s bravery and commitment to the process has been paramount in the creation of this show. Working with us on the creative side we had an experienced team, many of whom have worked with us before on previous productions. They applied their infinite skill and imagination to produce outstanding lighting, sound and costume design, perfectly capturing the style and drama of the play.

Design...



MODEL

The set was a simple arrangement comprising two platforms each two metres high and two and a half metres square. These platforms were positioned upstage of a thrust stage and were six metres apart. The stage right platform was accessed by a staircase which ran from the in-stage side down to the thrust.



SET UNDER CONSTRUCTION

This staircase was ninety centimetres across to accommodate two actors sitting side by side when supposedly aboard a horse drawn trap or cart. This stage right platform also had a staircase leading off into the wings. The stage left platform was accessed by two full length ladders on the in-stage side and secured to the stage and the top of the platform.



COMPLETED SET

This platform also had a separate staircase running at the rear into the wings. These platforms were used for a number of scenes, but particularly in Crick's dairy where the stage left platform became the dairymaid's bedroom. Also during these scenes the stage right platform became Angel Clare's room.

Apart from those uses, the platforms were used in some scenes to allow actors to enter from above. In addition lighting was a major feature in the design of this production. Key lights allowed for isolation of specific areas to move the action quickly from one location to another.



LIGHTING TECHNICAL

Costumes and Props...



BREAKFAST AT CRICK'S DAIRY



FLINTCOMB ASH

The costumes for this production are of a period but not totally date specific. Our costume designers perfectly interpreted our brief of providing each actor with a basic costume to which were added shawls, scarves, aprons, bonnets, waistcoats and hats, as and when required. Skirts had to be above the ankle to allow for all the physical action involving climbing ladders and the many movement sequences. The costumes also reflected the mood of the play and moved from being fairly bright in the first half to being much darker and sombre in the second half.



KINGSBERE



ALEC and TESS

The props for the show were minimal and only specific when needed to be. Farm implements such as scythes and pickaxes were mimed in the movement sequences. Items of luggage, suitcases backpacks and shoulder bags were provided where appropriate. The furniture used was also minimal and comprised a number of stools and four bentwood chairs.

ACT ONE



ACT TWO





The Tess Company

Alison Griffin

Lucy Hayton

Rory Hobson

Ella Hooper

Hannah Hughes

Zac Karaman

Nigel Lawrence

Francis Lloyd

Maddy MacConnol

Victor Mellors

Alex McDevitt

Derek Stoddart

Hannah Webster

Joan Durbeyfield / Caretaker

Marian / Car Darch / Modesty / Girl at May Dance

Angel Clare

Tess Durbeyfield

Mrs Crick / Mercy Chant / 2nd Woman

Felix / Abraham / Groom / Postman

John Durbeyfield / Groby / Man at Kingsbere

Revd Clare / Jonathan / Driver / Policeman

Liza-Lu / Retty Priddle

Alec d'Urberville

Mrs Clare / Mrs d'Urberville / Mrs Brooks / 1st Woman

Cuthbert / Parson Tringham / Mr Crick / Prince

Izz Huett / Hope / Elizabeth / Girl at May Dance

Directed by: Mike Langridge and Caroline Bleakley

Designed by: Mike Langridge

Lighting Designer: Andrew Dixon

Sound and Original Music: Daniel Beilby

Costume Design: Nichola Thomas and Jenny Richardson

Photography : Jane Arnold-Forster

Reactions to the premiere production of Tess of the d'Urbervilles:

'A great new adaptation and production' . Jessica Carney Associates

It's a real masterpiece, all set off by a wonderful cast of actors who were amazing.

An outstanding work of art. If you haven't seen it yet, it's an absolute must see.

It's so exciting to see something so bold, so ambitious.

The star of the evening for me was the breathtaking fluidity and imagination of the direction.

Inventive direction and truly fluid storytelling plus beautiful performances

A highly sensitive and inventive production which captures the essence of the novel entirely.

The cast are all, without exception, individually excellent, but together form a wonderful cohesive team.

The enthusiastic standing ovation at the end proved however that I am not alone in my opinion that it's a truly remarkable, highly professional adaptation of ultimately, a great story.

A highly imaginative production! The beautiful and significant visual images constantly changed focus and with such fluidity by a very disciplined ensemble.

Absolutely amazing production. Our congratulations to everyone involved. Totally absorbed from the beginning until the finish.

Very powerful and moving play. Don't miss it.

We attended the opening night and it truly was a captivating performance throughout. So glad we came from Yorkshire to see it! Good luck with the rest of the week -you deserve a full house every night.

So good I saw it twice. A fine example of how to take a classic novel to the stage from a team who know a thing or two about this specialist craft.

Ensemble theatre at its best. Innovative and inspiring. Last night's performance got a well deserved standing ovation.

Beautiful and heartbreaking

What a fantastic production! Love it. The leads made me cry almost immediately when she looked at Angel Clare. Poor Tess. Beautifully staged. A lovely adaptation.

Went last Friday. One of the best plays I have ever seen. Loved it!

Absolutely brilliant performance! Went last night and it was awesome and a really brilliant play!

This was beyond amazing

Take tissues!!!

Brilliant!



TightGrip Productions Ltd

Artistic Directors:



Mike Langridge

Mike is a joint founder of TightGrip Productions and an actor, director and designer. Besides directing he has appeared in over one hundred plays including The Long And The Short And The Tall, Henry IV Part 1 and II, Cat On A Hot Tin Roof, Macbeth, Heartbreak House, Othello, The Malcontent, One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest, Destiny, Coriolanus, Antigone, The Crucible, A Mad World My Masters, As You Like it, A View From The Bridge, Edward II, Romeo And Juliet, Faust, Faith Healer, Waltz Of The Treaders, Death And The Maiden, Hotel In Amsterdam, Good, Broken Glass, Festen, Hamlet, Translations, Oh What A Lovely War!, Yerma, The Promise, The Merchant Of Venice, The Bald Prima Donna, Oedipus, The Devil's Disciple, The Taming Of The Shrew, Nicholas Nickleby Parts 1 & 2, Butley, When We Dead Awaken, Measure For Measure, Bedroom Farce, The Front Page, The Seagull and most recently All My Sons.

Caroline Bleakley

Caroline is a joint founder of TightGrip Productions and a professional film editor and actor. Caroline's extensive film editing experience has provided her with insight into the skill of how to tell stories in an exciting way making them fluid and seamless. Besides directing, Caroline has appeared in over 30 plays including Translations, The Rivals, Yerma, Destiny, Dancing at Lughnasa, The Taming Of The Shrew, Heartbreak House, Lady Betty, Sweeney Todd, Translations, Hamlet, Henry the IV part 1, All My Sons, Macbeth, The Winters Tale, Lady Betty, Nicholas Nickleby Parts 1 & 2, Festen, The Seagull, Les Liaisons Dangereuses and most recently The Cripple of Inishmaan. As a film editor her credits include: Top Girls, Inspector George Gently, Monarch of the Glen, Wild at Heart, Death in Paradise, Lewis, Midsomer Murders, Hearts and Bones, Dalziel and Pascoe, Sea of Souls, The Bill and Holby City.

Production History

Mike and Caroline have jointly directed many productions over the past twenty years. Among these have been both parts of David Edgar's Nicholas Nickleby, The Hired Man, Noises Off, Great Expectations, The Crucible, Privates On Parade, Sweeney Todd, Mrs Warren's Profession, Lady Betty, Burnt By The Sun, and The Last of the Haussmans. In 2014 TightGrip Productions staged Shadowlands and as well as directing the play, Mike and Caroline took the leading roles of C S Lewis and Joy Gresham. Their latest collaboration has been adapting, producing and directing their new stage version of Tess of the d'Urbervilles which premiered in 2018.



TightGrip
Productions